



Almost Famous



*The “Other” Root Brother
and His Humble Design*

When I first laid eyes on the eclectic Fred S. Bullene House (1185 Fillmore) in Topeka's Holliday Park Historic District, I was intrigued. But when I learned that an architect named Root designed the cutting-edge 1909 pseudo-bungalow, I was elated. Could the home be the work of John Wellborn Root, an architect who paired with Daniel H. Burnham to build the world's largest architecture firm and design some of the best-known commercial architecture of the late nineteenth century?

Most students or practitioners of architecture recognize the names Burnham and Root. Daniel H. Burnham, a popular problem solver with political aspirations, joined forces with the studious and practical John W. Root in 1873. In the years that followed, Burnham and Root helped hone the burgeoning Chicago and Romanesque styles of commercial architecture.

Some preliminary research soon debunked the theory that John W. Root designed the Bullene House, as he died prematurely in 1891 (some sources say 1892), eighteen years before the Bullene House was built. While pouring through a stack of research materials provided by property owner Michael Ganser, I uncovered the captivating truth behind the home's design. The progressive home was not the creation of John Root, but rather that of his younger brother Walter who dedicated his lifelong architectural career to the Kansas City region. Walter C. Root (1859-1925) outlived his more-famous older brother by thirty-four years. The Bullene House appeared on a list of Walter's known works compiled by Barbara Anderson for a paper in 1990 (see page five).

Walter began his architectural career in 1880 when he joined his brother's firm. In 1886, he moved to Kansas City, Missouri, to oversee a number of the firm's projects there, including the Kansas City Board of Trade Building (1888), Midland Hotel Building (1888), and the

American National Bank Building (1888), all since destroyed.

By the time of his brother's death in 1891, Walter had struck out on his own in Kansas City where he gained the attention of a long list of friends and clients, no doubt with the help of his wife's influential family. In 1896, he joined George M. Siemens, a graduate of the Cornell University architectural program, to form the firm Root and Siemens. The team designed hundreds of commercial, religious and residential buildings in Kansas City, including the Scarritt Building (1907), Institutional Church (1905), and houses for several prominent residents. The firm's Kansas designs included Flint Hall (1899) and Dyche Hall (1902) at the University of Kansas, Maple



The Bullene House, at 1185 SW Fillmore in Topeka, was designed by Walter Root in 1909.

Hill Congregational Church (1903) in Maple Hill, Grace Episcopal Cathedral (1916) and Chester Woodward House (1924) in Topeka, Baker House (1900) in Atchison, and ten buildings on the campus of St. Marys College in St. Marys beginning in 1907.

The Bullene House was modest in comparison to Walter Root's other work, which boasts large-scale institutional and religious buildings and well-appointed homes for Kansas City's wealthiest residents. Still, when completed, the Bullene House elicited a beyond-modest response. According to an article in the *Topeka State Journal* on August 28, 1909 (see illustrations at left), the home was "A Real Bungalow," with "All Signs of Comfort."

The attention was in part a response to the home's unique design. The modest house was juxtaposed with two-story Italianate, Queen Anne, and Foursquare homes in the then-prestigious Holliday

Park neighborhood. And, although it is not what we would classify as a high-style Craftsman home, it was ahead of its time. Although Craftsman and Bungalow homes proliferated in the 1910s and 1920s when catalog and lumber companies began distributing standard bungalow home plans, the movement was in its infancy in 1909. It was not until 1909, in fact, that Gustav Stickley began publishing home plans in his magazine *The Craftsman*.

In contrast to its contemporaries, but like later bungalows, the Bullene home was only one story in height. However, like the contemporary Foursquares, a derivative of the Prairie Style, the home featured a hipped roof with shallow hipped dormers. Although some bungalows had hipped roofs, most high-style examples featured shallow front- or side-gabled roofs. The design also included some Mission elements, including a stuccoed exterior and stepped porch beam. Like homes of the related Mission, Prairie, and Craftsman styles, the interior featured beamed ceilings and built-ins. Based upon the image in the 1909 news article, the home was furnished with Mission furniture.

As demonstrated by a list of his commissions, Root made a successful career designing mansions and large commercial buildings for wealthy clients. Why, then, did Walter Root, at the height of his career, design this modest, albeit high quality, home? The answer lies with the man who commissioned the house, Fred S. Bullene (1864-1918). Bullene, a respected correspondent for the *Kansas City Star*, was, according to the *Topeka State Journal*, a "crusty bachelor" who had "Proved That He [could] Be Independent of Women." More telling, Bullene was Walter Root's wealthy brother-in-law. Walter Root had married Miss Lora Bullene in 1891. Lora and Fred were the children of Thomas Bullene, a shaker in Kansas City society – department store owner, mayor, and president of the Kansas City Railroad Company.

As a bachelor, Fred S. Bullene did not commission a home to meet the expectations of most people commissioning homes at the time. Although the public's expectations of space were beginning to change and bungalows would soon flood the new home marketplace, most houses built before the 1910s were larger or at

This article was prepared by Christy Davis, assistant director of the Cultural Resources Division.

The images of the Fred Bullene House on page three appeared in the Topeka State Journal on Saturday, August 28, 1909.

Walter C. Root's Projects

The following is a partial list of projects by Walter Root or by the architectural firm of Root and Siemens. The list was compiled by Barbara Anderson.

Kansas City

C. E. Hochstetler Residence, Hyde Park (c. 1890)
H. C. Sprague Residence, Hyde Park (c. 1892)
Warehouse for W. J. Smith, Esq. (c. 1895)
Francis McCord, Esq. House (c. 1896)
Christ Church (no date, possibly 1896)
Scarritt Bible and Training School, northeast corner Askew and Norledge (no date)
Alterations to American National Bank Building, 728 Delaware (1897)
G. B. Wing Residence (1900)
Elliot Jones Residence (c. 1900)
Warehouses for Studebaker Brothers Manufacturing Co. (c. 1902)
Studebaker Brothers Wagon & Carriage House, 1320 W. 13th (1903)
The Meyer Building, 1114 Grand (1903) Revised by Hoit, Price & Barnes drawings dated 8/10/22 and 11/5/23
Rieger Residence (c. 1903)
C. A. Brockett Residence (c. 1903)
A. W. Childs Residence (c. 1903)
W. B. Thayer, Esq. (c. 1903)
John Taylor Dry Goods Store, Baltimore Avenue (1904)
City Hospital (also General Hospital), 24th & Cherry (1904 or 1905-1908)
All Souls Unitarian Church, 3431 Baltimore (1905)
Institutional Church (1905)
The Illinois Apartment Building (c. 1905)
W. W. Sylvester Residence (c. 1905)
Scarritt Office Building and Arcade, 818 Grand and 819 Walnut (1906)
Labor Temple, southwest corner 14th and Woodlawn (1907)
George Carkener Residence, Bellview and Randolph (1907)
Postal Telegraph Building, 8th and Delaware (1908)
W. M. Reed House (c. 1908)
Woolf Brothers, 1024-1026 Walnut (1909)
Penn Valley Park stable and storage building, 3001 Central (1909)
Abernathy Furniture Co., Building J, 1221-1225 W. 9th (1910)
Boys Hotel, southeast corner Admiral Blvd. and Flora Ave. (1911)
Bay State Land Co., 922-928 Main (1913)
Graves Building, 11th and Main (1914)
Badger Lumber Co. Office, Westport Road and Pennsylvania (1915)
H. I. Wilson House (c. 1915)
J. R. Woodworth, Esq. House (c. 1915)
Duff Repp Furniture Co. Warehouse, 1524-1530 Locust (1916)
J. C. Fennell House (c. 1916)
Abernathy Furniture Co. Warehouse #10, 9th to 10th and Wyoming (1918)

Niles Home for Colored Orphans, 23rd and Euclid Avenue (1924)
Country Club Christian Church Units #2 and #3 (1924)
Country Club Congregational Church, 205 W. 65th (1925, addition 1948)
Remodel Westport M.E. Church, northwest corner 40th and Washington (1925)
Robert L. Taylor Residence
Langston Bacon Residence
Bacon Building, 1020-1022 Walnut (no date)
David Long House, 2958 E. 30th (no date)
Thayer Building, northeast corner 7th and Broadway
Metropolitan St. Railway Co. Central Power House (no date)
J. I. Glavars House (no date)

Atchison, Kansas

Francis and Harriet Baker House, 823 N. 5th St. (1902)



The Chester Woodward House at 1272 Fillmore in Topeka was designed by Walter Root in 1924.

Lawrence, Kansas

Fowler Shops (now Flint Hall), University of Kansas (1898 or 1899)
Dyche Shops and Museum, University of Kansas (1902)
A. D. Weaver Residence

Maple Hill, Kansas

Congregational Church (c. 1903)

St. Marys, Kansas

Immaculata Chapel (1907-1909)
Loyola Hall (1907)
Eight other buildings on the St. Marys College campus

Topeka, Kansas

New England Office Building
Santa Fe Railroad Office Building (1912)
Grace Episcopal Cathedral (1916) (c. 1904)
Chester Woodward Residence, 1272 Fillmore Street (1924)
Bullene House, 1185 Fillmore (1909)

Fayette, Missouri

Science Hall, Central College (c. 1894)
Cupples Dorm, Central College (c. 1894)

Harrisonville, Missouri

Cass County Courthouse

Unknown Location

W. J. Smith Plant
Riverside Power House

Almost Famous

Continued from 4

least more imposing in design. Unlike most owners of smaller homes, Bullene was wealthy. The combination of Bullene's bachelorhood and wealth, in addition to his personal connection to a skilled architect, resulted in the creation of a home ahead of its time, both in design and function. Although the Bullene home pales in size and grandeur to the homes that surround it, including the Walter Root-designed Chester Woodward House on the next block, it is a unique example of a comparatively humble, yet thoughtfully designed home.